

Some Changes

By PRISCILLA HARRIS

One of the first questions people living in Duxbury tend to ask one another after the introduction, invariably is: "How long have you been living in Duxbury?" When I am asked, and I answer "I was born here." (which doesn't exactly answer their question) I always get the surprised response, "Really?" followed by, "You must have seen a great many changes in the town." I never know quite what to say to that, especially now that we're burning wood again, same as in my childhood.

I live on a street where the last house was built in 1936 and the first in 1667, and when my husband and I bought my old homestead from the rest of the family 12 years ago, just about all my old neighbors were still here, including my first childhood friend. My neighbor's magnificent spruce tree had tripled in size, our over 100-year-old lindens looked pretty beat, both having been struck by lightning, and stripped down by 2 hurricanes, but the street looked much the same. The rest of the town has certainly spread in all directions, and if you happen to be near a school at closing time you are certainly aware of the population growth; but if you are driving anywhere in Duxbury after 7 pm on a cold winter night, you might meet one or 2 other cars. Then you realize that the 14,000 inhabitants of the town are in their homes, trying to keep warm just as the 2,500 were when you were a child.

However, one does notice a few basic changes. For instance, Duxbury used to be pronounced just the way it is written. Now when someone gets up at town meeting and says DucksBERRY this and DucksBERRY that, you can bet he hasn't been here very long. There also seems to have been an attempt to change the geographic delineations of the town.

If someone said he lived in West Duxbury you knew he lived anywhere from the area of Osborne's Store to the Methodist Church on High St. Now, where West Duxbury begins and ends is anybody's guess. Lincoln and Temple streets were in North Duxbury, not West. Congress St. and a part of Franklin St. were what made up Ashdod. Everyone knew where Tinkertown began and ended. I guess the boundaries of Powder Point, Millbrook, Snug Harbor, Standish Shore remain pretty much the same. However many of these villages used to have their own post offices. We had ours and everybody walked to it, waited around for the mail and were forced to

take note of others waiting, which made for communication. This time of year it helped ward off cabin fever and helped us keep track of who was sick. A typical conversation went something like this: Postmistress: "So-and-So hasn't been in to pick up his mail for 2 days. Does anybody know if he's ailing?" Concerned neighbor: "Don't know, but I'll sure as hell find out." Now somebody's mail could stay in his box for several days and we wouldn't know it, unless the overload of junk mail started to fall out. There used to be little junk mail; sometimes in the winter, Hiram's (our mailman) canvas bag looked pretty skinny. (He always carried it over his shoulder, like Santa Claus). When it was particularly skinny and it took Nancy, the postmistress, about 3 minutes to "sort the mail" and put it in the boxes, some wisecrack would remark "who got the letter?" The others would chortle as they shuffled home in the snow.

The sociological make-up of the town has, of course, changed. For years it remained pretty much the same. There were 3 or 4 French Canadian families, one Italian, one Jewish, 8 or 9 Scandinavian, several Cape Verdian; the ancestors of the others all came over on the Mayflower.

We, the foreign element, (pronounced "fawn") were exposed to people who not only knew who their great-great-grandparents were, but what they did for a living and how many children they had. To us this was awesome, not even having grandparents on this side of the Atlantic. Having an elementary teacher whose ancestors also came over on the Mayflower, we started making Thanksgiving turkeys and pasting them on the windows right after Columbus Day; and the hardships of the Pilgrims was drummed into our heads for several weeks of every year; (probably the reason I've always had a soft spot for the Indians.) As for Columbus Day, we Swedes couldn't get too excited about it; knowing full well that Leif Erickson got here a few hundred years before Columbus did. Sometimes my mother felt we weren't getting a well-rounded education; she was convinced of it the day I came home from school and told her we had been studying about Sweden, and showed her the paragraph in my book. It was accompanied by a sketch of 2 fur-clad humans standing by a reindeer. I asked her if that was the way she dressed as a child in Sweden. She blew her top. "Those are Laplanders, and they live way up north. To say that that is the way Swedes dress is like saying that Americans dress like Eskimos." I didn't quite believe her. How could my geography book be wrong?

No, things were not that easy for the foreign born moving into a Yankee town. One day my older

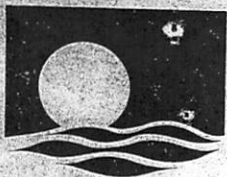
brother came home from school and my mother said, "Hello Paul, did you have a good day?" Only she said it in Swedish. His answer was, "Don't speak Swedish to me, today I carried the American flag." Much later in life he became the commander of the American Legion in Duxbury.

Before routes 3 and 53 were built, the main route from the Cape to Boston, (originally the Kings Highway), included High St. All sorts of people stopped at our farm. They added excitement and color to our lives. Twice a year the gypsies came. There would be at least 3 carfuls. They didn't have a good reputation, which in some cases, I'm afraid, was true. We children witnessed a beautiful gypsy girl relieve the storekeeper of his gold watch, and in a loud chorus, told him. He was furious and ordered her out of his store; us, too, because he was embarrassed, I guess.

Having a farm on this main road, we sold eggs and chickens and whatever vegetables and fruits were in season. My mother was constantly being interrupted in her bread-baking, canning and other housewifely activities. One day a man came and asked how much our eggs cost. She said 45 cents a dozen. The man said "The lady across the street is selling them for 40 cents." "Then why don't you just go across the street and buy her eggs?" my mother asked him. "She's all out of them." "Well," my mother said "if I was all out of them I'd be selling them for 35 cents."

One day in June a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce glided into our yard. Sitting next to the chauffeur was a reddish-haired man, and as the 2 back doors flew open an assortment of healthy-looking children emerged, followed by a pretty woman. The man came to the kitchen door and asked if we had any strawberries to sell. We did. He bought all we had. That was the beginning of a long association with the Kennedy family. At one point they gave us a Newfoundland dog which had belonged to the 2 oldest sons, Joe and Jack. The dog had been happy in Hyannis Port, but we knew he would be miserable in New York. Not only did the father and sons often come to see Buddy, (the dog), but sometimes brought Hyannis Port weekend guests to see him. One such was Gloria Swanson's then husband, who was a Marquis, and looked it with his little waxed mustache.

If anybody had told us that out of that group of children; whom we saw off and on for several years, one would become President of the United States, one Attorney General, and one a U.S. Senator and that 2 of them would be assassinated, never in this world would we have believed them.



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